

The Ture of Earth

By Charles E. Moxse



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⁷
The Rev. John MacDonnell, author
the author's kind regards.

THE LURE OF EARTH

Amherst.

Nov. 1922.

BY THE SAME WRITER

SHAKSPERE'S SKULL AND
FALSTAFF'S NOSE
POETRY, AS A FINE ART
ELLA LEE; GLIMPSES OF
CHILD LIFE

THE LURE OF EARTH

AND OTHER POEMS

BY

CHARLES E. MOYSE



LONDON

ELKIN MATHEWS, VIGO STREET

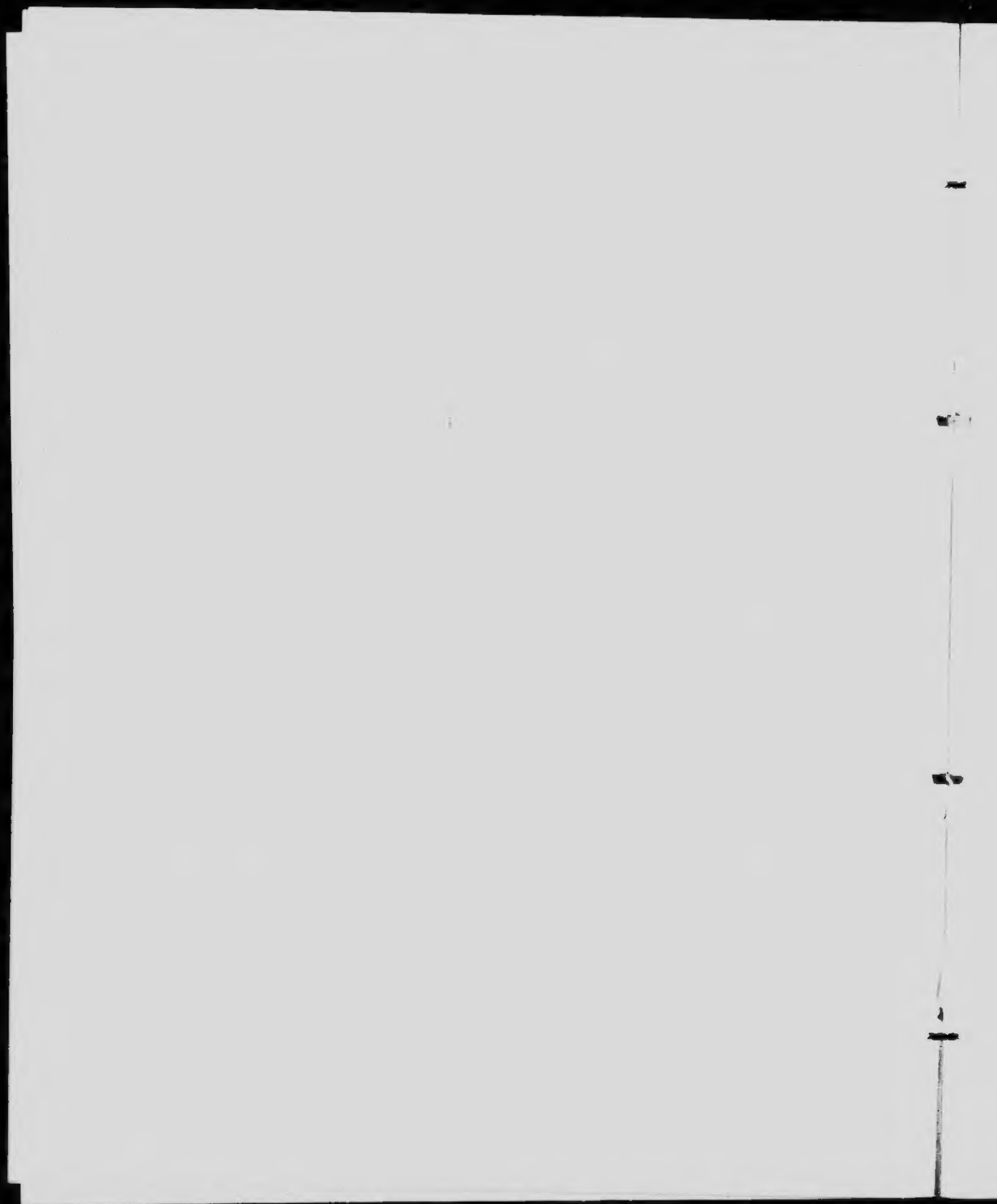
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TO MY WIFE



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The Lure of Earth

HEAVEN and song and gold,
And lights that swim—
Ah, for the earth of old!
My cherubim
Together lie in fold
There—he by him.

Surely a moment past
I climbed the stair,
And saw the moonbeams cast
On flaxen hair,
And stooped—a kiss—my last—
On foreheads fair.

Some captive fancy, caught
In waking hours,

THE LURE OF EARTH

Was loosened into thought
By slumber's powers:
A smile—as if I brought
His favourite flowers.

There on the table stood
The playthings—near;
The martial frame of wood,
The grenadier,
Little Red Riding Hood,
Guarded—for fear.

Then silently I crept
Back to my room,
My anxious heart now swept
To joy, now gloom:
Thought died away; I slept,
Unknowing doom.

It seems ethereal, strange,
This perfect life!
My yearnings downward range
To earthly strife,

THE LURE OF EARTH

To flesh and blood, to change,—
Once more a wife!

I cannot see for glare
Of golden ray;
My white lips move in prayer,—
“O for earth’s day,
Earth’s night and cooling air,
Earth’s love—alway!”

At dusk, beyond the heath,
A widowed soul
Stands by my grave beneath,
Human and whole,
And lifts the lily wreath,
And reads the scroll.

O taste of bygone bliss!
There, ’mid earth’s dead,
My smiling lips he’ll kiss,
Re-vermeiléd,
And take my hand, nor miss
Old words we said.

THE LURE OF EARTH

Then the steep lane we'll climb,
Where hawthorns blow,
Where, in late winter time,
Flowers break the snow,
And faint the belfry-chime
Beats from below.

Afar, the red cliffs lean
O'er beaches white;
The darkening bay serene
Dissolves in night,
And the curved shore is seen
A lane of light.

Look, love! The bright orb steals
O'er yon dark crest,
And vale and roof reveals,
Where, in our nest,
Soft eyelids slumber seals,
By me unpressed.

Beloved, come! . . . I stand
Beside the bed,

THE LURE OF EARTH

And stroke with human hand
Each tiny head,
Once more, on earth's far strand,
Recomforted.

Sursum

HUSH, vex me not ! The soul
Makes her own creed ;
Borne to an unseen goal,
Whate'er impede,
A shrine she keepeth whole,
Though the heart bleed.

The lingering shades of night
Now melt away,
And, see ! the blind grows white
With dawning day,
And soon shall ruddy light
Flood sky and spray.

Come, wheel my chair again
The window near ;
What murmur in my brain
Grows yet more clear

SURSUM

'Tnat 'mid the pulse of pain
I could not hear?

Its tones are those of earth,
Solemn, nor strange—
His voice? Doth then new birth
Bring naught of change,
Of human speech no dearth,
Where spirits range?

Surely he prayeth low
To God for me;
Methinks the words—but so
'Tis God's decree
That mortals may not know
What words they be.

And like the dying hymn
Of minster choir,
That floats through spaces dim,
High and yet higher,
And joins the cherubim
Ere it expire,—

SURSUM

I hear an antiphon,
From lips unseen,
Take up his accents lone
That come between—
'Tis gone—perchance its tone
Hath never been.

Go, part the curtains free,
The blind upraise;
Once more I fain would see
The city ways
We wandered, I and he,
In bygone days.

Silent o'er lea and lawn
The low mist lies;
Up through the gray of dawn
The steeples rise,
And pierce the red flush drawn
In eastern skies.

There on the hill-side climbs
The straggling street;

SURSUM

And there, the grove of limes
Beside the wheat,
Where oft in summer times
I led his feet.

The fitful gusts would blow,
Cleaving the grain,
And flash of poppies show
A crimson vein,
Then vanish in the glow
Of gold again.

And gazing on the field
In mute surprise,
As if God had revealed
To infant eyes
A sudden glory sealed
To old and wise,

My darling stands; and then
From that high land
We come down through the glen,
And by the strand,

SURSUM

And on through hum of men,
Hand laid in hand.

Once more I see a rout
Of school-boys play,
And hear the victor shout
Rise from the fray,—
And borne in triumph out
He moves away.

My dying eyes scarce mark
Yon school-house there;
Oft late into the dark
When city lights would flare
I've seen his taper's spark
Beyond the glare.

Once more the garlands hung,
The happy eyes,
The song of welcome sung,
The play's disguise,
The generous cheers outflung,
The crowning prize!

SURSUM

Ah me! for him my choice
Should be the same;
'Tis well ambition's voice
Men cannot tame,
Bidding them weep, rejoice,
Nor sink to shame.

O college walls that soar
Beside the wave,
Your ancient peace and lore
A child he'd crave,—
Never can ye restore
What once I gave!

Yours are the little room,
The roaring gale,
The flickering light, the gloom,
The lashing hail,
The final hour of doom,
The features pale.

His head he bade me lift,
Half in a dream;

SURSUM

Flung through the moving drift
He watched the beam,
And, pointing to the rift,
Passed in the gleam.

I hear him praying low
To God for me;
At last God's peace I know,
From earth soon free. . . .
I fall asleep . . . I go . . .
With him to be.

Death and Love

TO-DAY I passed the field that holds my dead,
And I..urned not. What hath chanced, O heart,
to thee,

Death's victim once, and spoiled relentlessly
Of every dream and hope that thou hadst wed
To them alone? Now, worldly longings bred
Calmly, as April rain falls calm and free,
Waking the roses and the fruiting tree
Ere the year dieth, rule in Sorrow's stead.
O Love, dost thou play false with mortal life,
And thine imperial image fade away,
As fades a sceptered king in minted gold,
By touch on touch? Refashioned in earth's strife,
Recrowned, Love hears his dead, newborn, who
say,
Attain life's best before life's tale is told.

“ ‘What can I work that others
have not wrought? ’ ”

“ ‘WHAT can I work that others have not wrought?
What can I think that others have not thought?
What can I fight that others have not fought? ’ ”

Nothing! Yet work, nor slime a life in play,
And think, and so speak like a man, not jay,
And fight whate'er dishonours thee, and slay.

The Fairy Queen's Lullaby

LADY, sleep! The dawn is breathing
O'er the uplands, brown and cool,
Gently breathing where the grasses
Bend and break the fairies' pool.

(Chorus of Fairies)

Sleep! The bells of heather red,
Touching, parting, overhead,
Softly sigh
"Lullaby!"

Lady, sleep! The moorland spectres,
Seeking now their barrow lone,
Leave the crumbling homes they rounded,
When earth hid her ore unknown.

THE FAIRY QUEEN'S LULLABY

Sleep! Beneath the opening spray,
Moonlight circles fainter play;
Ere they die,
Lullaby!

Lady, sleep! The dreams of elf-land
Vanish from the rustic's brain;
When the night descends, shall fairies
Whisper in his ear again.

Sleep! The guard is round thee set;
O'er thee stems, in feathery net,
Arching lie;
Lullaby!

The Fairy Queen's Awakening

LADY, awake! The last footstep of mortal
Rustles no longer in bracken and heath;
No longer folds of the dying sun's portal
Scatter their flame on the moorland beneath.

(Chorus of Fairies)

Where the marsh grass, silky-white,
Carpets thick the dreaded ground,
Elf-fires, now gone, now alight,
Glisten, glisten in their flight,
Bidding fairies tread the round
Of richer green:
Awake, O Queen!

Lady, awake! O'er the east ridge is growing,
Lucid as dewdrop, the pale argent sky;
Dark and still darker the cleft peaks are showing,
Ere the moon veil them with light from on high.

THE FAIRY QUEEN'S AWAKENING

List! The moth, with wings in play,
Creeps upon the tufted broom;
Now, beneath the hedge-row spray,
Glow-worms cast their mellow ray
Where the velvet mosses bloom
In grot unseen:
Awake, O Queen!

Lady, awake! Let thine elves place a token
Where the near hamlet has buried its pride;
Round her young grave shall they keep watch
unbroken,
Lest, in the night-hour, mischances betide.

Come, and gather blossoms meet,—
Roses, for her beauty's sake,
Jasmine, for her graces sweet;
From the amber brook's retreat,
For her troth, blue speedwells take
Of tinct serene:
Awake, O Queen!

My Love is not as Your Love is

My love is not as your love is,
Her eyes are brown, not blue;
Her ringlets rival jet itself,
Your love's are gold of hue.

My love is not as your love is,
She is a tiny thing;
Yours, Juno-like, steps stately by,
And men gaze—worshipping.

My love is not as your love is,
She sings at eventide;
Your love, with fair and placid face,
In silence doth abide.

My love is just as your love is,
She has a heart as true;
And my love—well, she loveth me,
And your love—loveth you.

Come a-maying

COME a-maying, come a-maying,
Mays will soon Novembers be,
O'er the earth the sky is graying,
As men's creeds are disarraying
Fancy and her witchery:
Come a-maying!

Come a-maying, come a-maying,
Where the Hamadryads dwell,
Where the nymphs a-holidaying
Ring with dance Sylvanus, laying
On his knees white asphodel:
Come a-maying!

Come a-maying, come a-maying,
Gather posies rich and bright,—
Mid the woodland blue-bells straying,

COME A-MAYING

In whose cups the fairies swaying,
Held their revels yesternight:
Come a-maying!

Come a-maying, come a-maying,
Wander 'neath the cloud-flecked blue,
List the brooklet's roundelaying
Where it falls, and decks, in spraying,
Maidenhair with beads of dew:
Come a-maying!

Come a-maying, come a-maying,
Each cloud is a spirit's home;
Fashioned now, and now decaying,
As its spirit-lord obeying,
It disparts in airy foam:
Come a-maying!

Come a-maying, come a-maying,
See the leaves, in gentle swing,
Fairy footfalls soft betraying;
Elfin hosts alight, and playing,
Set the wood a-murmuring:
Come a-maying!

COME A-MAYING

Come a-maying, come a-maying,
Round the maypole trip at eve,
Till the ribbons, gaily raying,
Low and lower creep, inlaying
All the shaft with coloured sleeve:
Come a-maying!

Submerged

At the gate where gentlemen make the laws,
She stopped one wintry night;
And she wrapped her shawl close—how it tears,
how it gnaws,
That hunger, with cruel spite!—
And marvelled why the gay beam flashe'd from the
tower's stately height.

O'er the distant lanes, o'er the streets and
squares,
The great eye circled round,
And she thought, as she gazed, if the eye of God
stares
So far, far above the ground,
So cold, so clear; not half way up, and the cry of
want is drowned.

SUBMERGED

And the people surged at the entry there,
For Party was at stake;
And the whips were worn out with the worry and
care,
And all for the Party's sake;
Men said the Ministry was doomed when the
Opposition spake.

Yet again the cheers ringing sharp and shrill,
From gaping throats upsent,
And the loudest of all for the member whose
bill
Was startling the Parliament;
Her feeble cheer—she knew not why—with the
multitude's was blent.

In the land the poor shall for ever be,
The Christ said that of old;
But they ought to abide where the rich cannot
see,
Away from the marts of gold,
Away from statecraft's lordly pomp, where the
nation's fame is scrolled.

SUBMERGED

'Twas a grand debate; the Commons was
thronged
With Commoner and Peer;
And they swore that the flag of their country was
wronged,
Afar in the western sphere:
The woman crawled and huddled down by the
bridge's pathway near.

And the night crept on, and the votes were
classed—
The old regime was dead!
And the beam, flashing round, lit a form, as it
passed,
Whose soul from its clay had fled,
And silent stood by God's white throne, where the
deeds of State are said.

Jetsam

THIS wave that breaks in brilliance on the shore,
Once in its primal dew was lost to sight;
All powerless then this gathered arch of might,
And murmurless this line of hollow roar.

Silent thy stature grows through little things;
Thence garner strength, which those who know
thee feel
Is patterned after One who shows more real
And mighty than man's sudden triumphings.

The worth of passing hours do thou presage,
Used well ere they irrevocably flee;
Learn that a soul heroic, happy, free,
Is Time's and not a moment's heritage.

Destiny

(To F. M. W.)

FAR below, the points of light
Run in meshes beaded white,
On and on, until the bars
Touch the bending dome of stars.
Silently the night hours creep
O'er the city wooing sleep;
One by one the gleams expire—
All are gone—save tongues of fire,
Smiting, as they orb in red,
Night's near canopy o'erspread,
Ere the furnace opened wide,
Flashes forth its molten tide.

Sudden, within reach of hand,
Like a mist there seemed to stand
Something lustrous 'mid the gloom

DESTINY

Filling my dim-lighted room.
Fringe of form nor shape was there,
Bounding that strange spectral air;
Only out from denser sheen,
Pulses—ne'er a pause between—
Throbbled, and reached the thinner veil
Showing scarce its lustre pale.
"What!" I said, "A spirit here?
Now at last shall all be clear;
I shall know, from spirit breath,
What our life means, what our death—
I, whose soul had kept aloof
Revelation, asking proof—
Now in sloth no longer furled,
Careless once of future world,
Sleeps my soul—this messenger
Bids my pulses wake and stir."

"One thought, spirit," so I said,
"Makes me wish to join the dead,
Brings my heart prolonged despair,
Haunts me moving everywhere."

DESTINY

Let me be the billionth man
Living since my kind began;
Find me now the faintest trace
Left by millions of my race
Who first worked and wept and died,
Joyed in home and son and bride,
Strove the first for human fame,
Won their triumphs with acclaim,
Passed away to nothingness,
Leaving millions the same stress,—
These again to pass away,
Leaving millions that essay
What their forefathers have done—
Never ending, oft begun—
Is our little height sole prize
Gained by such great sacrifice?
What, I ask, the recompense
Sent those futile lives—and whence?"

Lo! anear the spectral heart,
Waves of lustre seemed to part;
Then a voice, in accents clear,

DESTINY

Slowly met my listening ear:
"Hast thou ever, man, in strife"—
Such the words—"of mortal life
E'en a moment touched the base
All life rests on (where no trace—
None—of fleeting things gives shock)
Standing, conscious, on a rock,
Which for ever shall remain
Which Time's chances beat in vain?
You but take the things that seem—
Not the truth. To you the gleam
Shot, it may be, miles away
Whence the mirror took the ray,
Seems to spring from its own spark:
Move a step, and, lo! the dark."

"Yea," I said, "I've joyed earth's best
Felt myself at moments blest,
When in summer afternoon
Breathing rarest breath of June,
Carelessly I lay supine,
Drank in calm the air divine,
Watching fleece on fleece close-pressed

DESTINY

Cross the cloud-Alp in the west,
Motionless as on a rod
Hung on high by hand of God,
When in that warm air serene
Not a ripple stirred the green
Curve of leaves that clothed the hill,
Wrapped in silence deathly still;
Not a sound of insect heard
Save from leaf at my foot stirred
Fitfully by some small thing
Busy there with burrowing,—
Then I felt eternal balm
Wrap my soul in deepest calm.
Gently as I smoothed the grass
'Neath my hand, there seemed to pass
Off my heart the pain of earth;
Then I felt an earlier birth,
Stood unchastened by earth's rod,
Stood in very face of God,
Felt the elemental life
Far beneath the shocks of strife,
Felt eternal rest immerse
All this boundless universe."

DESTINY

"Rest! O nay," the voice replied,
"Follow whither I shall guide."

Then I felt myself uplift
Straight through cloudless air, and swift
Poised on high o'er earth that lay
Stretched, a huge disc, far away,
Blotting out the starry strand
Save where shone, in narrow band,
Sparkling points of diamond,
Deep in azure sky beyond.
Terror seized me, and I laid
Trembling, face in hands, afraid
Lest the world might swerve. I cried,
"Help me, spirit sanctified!
Wherefore hast thou brought me here?
All my senses numb with fear;
Gaze below I may not dare
Down on yon black circle there."
"Fear thou naught," the spirit said,
"We speed on as it is sped;
Come, and wing thy way to west,
Pass night's realm nor flight arrest

DESTINY

Ere is seen the twilight gray
Heralding the set of day."

As he spake, our flight increased,
Far and ever far from east;
Then the blackness seemed to fade
More and more, till half-displayed
Through the dim of evening air,
Like a map drawn faintly there
Where the band 'twixt day and night
Crossed the world in dubious light,
Earth's colossal features lay,
Mount and valley, stream and bay,
Dun and scattered spots on land,
Marking where earth's cities stand:
Westward yet, until there rolled
Pauselessly, an edge of gold;
Clear, the great Pacific brim
Turned in light, passed, reached the rim
Where the twilight shadows fall—
Disappeared in night's black pall;
Then the Five Great Stores of Snow,
Like white drops, moved far below :

DESTINY

Westward yet, until the sun,
Climbing up, to zenith run,
Showed the earth's vast dazzling globe
Covered now with golden robe
Broken ne'er from rim to rim—
Failed my sight—my brain 'gan swim.

“Where your bower of idleness?”
Said the spirit; “nay, confess!
Doth ‘Eternal rest immerse
All this boundless universe?’
Rushing yet within night's shade
Tiny beyond sight, thy glade
Spins in its diurnal course;—
Faster yet, impelled by force
Fashioning the circuit vast
Yon orb makes while time shall last.
Rest ‘the elemental life?’
Nay!—still less unceasing strife.
All the fret of men and stir
Will not move a gossamer
E'er so light that binds yon world,

DESTINY

Sightlessly, to myriads hurled
Far through heaven's interspace,
Which the laws of God embrace.
All the millions who are dead
Lived for thee and thine, and shed,
Knowing naught, on man their power,
Given as eternal dower.
Love thy kind—the greatest law,
Next to one, from him who saw
What your puny thoughts ne'er see—
Time set in eternity.
Work, and when thy end is found,
Straight in darkness 'neath the ground
Men shall lay thy silent frame
Wrapt in mould from whence thou came.
Know the puny force thou spent,
Blends, with God's acknowledgement,
Sightlessly in His great plan,
Reaches heights unknown to man,
Takes a new life elsewhere,
Moves its kind to ends more fair,
On and on, through life and death,
Life, to which thy mortal breath

DESTINY

Is as nothing. Cease to vex
Thoughts that weaken and perplex."

Earth again! And, lo, the morn
Rises o'er the plain, new-born;
Smoke in wavelets curling thin
Sees another day begin,
Sees earth's human heritage,
Bear anew its pilgrimage.

Wordsworth

I

POETS had sung of star and sky and hill,
And twilight beauty of the winding shore;
Had paused to catch the sounding torrent's roar,
To feel the gentler music of the rill
Change to their music; e'en thy daffodil
Had hymned a dirge that passeth nevermore,
And daisies lured thy Chaucer from the lore
Of books, to sing them with his royal skill.
But thou first sang the soul of cloud and light
And storm, draping the peak's solemnity,
Where Nature, 'mid her secrets rarely trod,
Communing with no spirit on the height
As she communed with thine, lay bare to thee,
And indistinguishable from her God.

II

Thou kept a course when thou didst voyage lone
Beyond all beacons of familiar seas,
Where poets sail in thronging companies,
The heavens and the elements thine own,—
Their Seer; yet visionless for an age prone
To watch the currents drifting where they please
Frail craft, that take the eye with braveries,
The ear, with dulcet music deftly blown.
That larger sea is not for us who shun
All waters unillumined in the night
By gleams we know; to take the common way,
View, listless, ancient headlands, one by one
Arise—their canopy earth's common light—
Suffices us, the creatures of our day.

III

("Hail, Twilight! sovereign of one peaceful hour!")

IN twilight hour I read the verse once more,
And raise mine eyes to mark beneath them spread,
A changing city, thickly tenanted,
Where late there stretched a lonely river shore.
Again I read; again dost thou restore
The vision of eternities—the bed
Of waters and the stars and hills, where led
By thee a solitary views the landscape o'er,
An ancient Briton—in Time's chain
A human link remote, and circled round,
Such was thy wont, with Nature—one of twain
And with her lasting things—thy chosen ground:
And poet of all voices, there doth reign
A hush inviolate o'er the scene—no sound!

IV

AMID the bases of the hills there play
Sounds of the humble life of common men:—
The housewife's song, the whistle from the glen
Of shepherd to his dog; the roundelay
Of reapers keeping harvest holiday;
The call of children nesting for the wren
Among the bushes, and, from rocky den,
The shout of schoolboys in their mimic fray.
Above, the craggy peak and rounded dome
Stand silent, 'mid the vast ethereal sea:
An altar of thy spirit, and a home
Of its divining voice, they image thee,
Whose loves and thought, whatever be their roam,
Are rooted in thy world, Humanity.

Hampstead, 1819

THOU nightingale upon the lonely crest,
Fringing the stretches dim of peopled plain,
What spirit wooed thee so, to build thy nest
Where north-borne breezes whisper fret and strain?
Balmy and fresh the air mid-April breathes,
Ruffling the cowslips, loved of thee, in glen
And way, whose hedge-tops flaunt the pearly zone
Of cloud with tangled wreaths
Of rose new-flushed:—Why pass them and the fen
Where Thames, dark-rimmed with willow, glideth
lone?

Whence didst thou come? Perchance on Latmian
mount

A midnight joy or requiem fancy-sad
Thou all unwitting warbled near the fount
Where, as he homeward turns, the shepherd lad

HAMPSTEAD, 1819

Pauses, and stares with large eyes at the cave
Whose darkness hides Endymion asleep,
Untouched for ever by Selene's kiss:
Borne o'er the eastern wave,
Didst thou alight and flood with song the steep
Whose ruined glory looks toward Salamis?

Ruined, yet still the triumph of our race,
And circled near with figures waxing dim;
Silent the hand of Time smooths every trace,
And gives to formless dust the sculptured limb:
When the last stone shall leave no relic there,
And splendour be a long-forgotten dream,
Shall new-born beauty come upon the earth,
And exquisitely fair,
A fane arise whose tinct and marble gleam
With line and hue unknown before he: birth?

Beyond the double gate Colonus, near,
Asks for thy song on its immortal brow:
Scant are the olive groves in which the seer
Of old once hymned thy race, O bird, and thou,

HAMPSTEAD, 1819

Ceasing awhile thy western flight didst stay
Beside the spot where, guided to his doom,
The aged king and blind, with parting hand,
Soft in its trembling play,
Caressed those faces dear all set in gloom,
Heard the dread voice, and passed from off the
land.

And thou wast here upon our Hampstead height,
And deathless made in one brief spring-tide morn
By him who, wasting with a hidden blight,
Had felt the icy touch of mock and scorn.
Within the plot of garden, girt with walls
And bathed in calm pure light of vernal prime,
Where the loved plum-tree's shade the sward along,
With green encircled, falls,
'Twas there Keats sat and wrote the wizard rhyme
That gave to immortality thy song.

Many a voice is ours; to him alone
The soul of Nature whispered secret things
Unsung before he came, unheard, unknown—
Secrets of earth's sleep and her murmurings.

HAMPSTEAD, 1819

Ah, all too soon, in fuller flood, decay
The ebbing waves of song to silence brought,
Brought pain and death beneath a foreign sky:
And didst thou wing thy way
To where by Tiber's stream his grave is sought,
And from the cypress sing his dirge, then die?

Francis Thompson:

(“THE HOUND OF HEAVEN”)

SUPERB in pomps and melodies that roll
Orchestral, with the pulse of plangent strings
Throbbing through bursts of deep-toned triumph-
ings,

A victor art thou of the mystic soul,
That can but follow—lost in thy control,
Yet o'er the vastness of created things
Borne puissant with thy imaginings—
Till it views Christ stand o'er thee—and the goal.
Yes, 'tis in reverie of moments calm,
Where love, not passion reigns, that we can see
The Christ, so human in the path he trod:—
But life, drawing us nearer Him than psalm
Or penitential tear, unselfishly
We *own* the world, and leave the rest to God.

An Empire in an Age of Gold

Thy latest dower to men behold,
My country, that hast now become
An empire, in an age of gold!

Thine is a story true and bold,
A tale of costly martyrdom:—
Thy latest dower to men behold!

Blindness and folly fret and scold,
Or noise, with flag and beat of drum,
An empire, in an age of gold.

Shall now thy offerings manifold
To freedom, truth, draw near their sum?—
Thy latest dower to men behold!

Beware lest now thy knell be tolled,—
For greed and lack of faith benumb
An empire, in an age of gold.

AN EMPIRE IN AN AGE OF GOLD

Pray that thy sons be not cajoled,
But build in honour, strong and dumb:—
Thy latest dower to men behold,
An empire, in an age of gold!

England

ONCE thou didst face the world, firm-eyed, serene,
Unknowing trepidation; and thy gaze,
My England, in oppression's lasting days
Bred patriots abroad; thy constant mien
Quickened their pulse of liberty, their keen
Disdain of torture and of death, to raise
The bondman to his own: what now displays
The England, unified, of Tudor Queen?
No longer one, with clamant factions rent,
Thy looks distraught, glancing at petty things,
Thy soul leaving the present to espy
The pictured past or on a pleasure bent,
Thou seest not an Empire's fashionings,
The harvest of a visionary eye.

Quebec

No scene of battle, with its heart of flame,
No vision calm, of beauty born
And peace, outlives the tale of morn,
When down the stream Wolfe's little forces came.

Three leagues above the city's bastioned hill,
Against the stars their watching eyes
Beheld the midnight signal rise,
And in the frigate's shrouds hang clear and still.

Straightway the crowded boats, with silent oar
Moved on the gently ruffled tide,
And gathered by the vessel's side,
And paused, and scanned the northern shore.

No warning fires they saw upon the height,
They caught no challenge of their foes ;
Then as the second signal rose,
They dipped their oars, and vanished in the night.

QUEBEC

And in the foremost boat, all weak and pale—
A knot of officers around—
Wolfe sat, a prey to thought: no sound
Was heard but whispers faint—so reads the tale.

I cannot tell what dark imaginings
Were sweeping through the hero's soul;
Perchance he heard the battle roll
Of morn, the rush of the destroyer's wings;

His heart perchance leapt weary leagues of sea,
And breathed farewell to plighted bride,
And prayed, in vain, the ebbing tide
Might bear him to her presence, silently.

Then turning, eyes and cheek a-glow, he spake
The solemn lines of deathless thought
Which in fate's hour supremely wrought
Upon a mood no enterprise could shake.

“‘The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,
And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,
Awaits alike the inevitable hour.
The paths of glory lead but to the grave.’

QUEBEC

"Perchance this path will lead me to my grave,
O poet, whose brow wreaths entwine
That shall outlive the droop of mine,
Though triumph mark me bravest of the brave!

"Yea, though ere dawning come I scale the height,
Ere eve, yon crowning citadel,
To me less dear the praise and swell
Of empire's vast acclaim than poet's might."

II

His shaft of stone looks silent to the stars,
And near it, scarce a mile away,
The twilight heaves a dim low mound of gray
That oft beat back the surging wave of wars.

Beneath the hill the belt of river runs;
Its flood, with bars of radiance set,
Is gleaming like a jewelled coronet,
Encircling his fair name through all the suns.

QUEBEC

His shaft of stone looks silent to the stars,
And near it, scarce a mile away,
Beyond the moat, beyond the mound of gray,
His splendid foe lies dead with glory's scars.

Life

You ask me what is life: I do not know;
I live, for powers unknown have willed it so;
They will that tides of darkness round me flow.

And powers unknown shall bid me cease to live,
Shall bid me yield the breath and frame they give,
Making me once more formless, fugitive.

Yet I am sovereign lord, in man's estate,
Of a vast realm, occult, inviolate,
Whose rule to me alone is consecrate.

Lord of my thought! Thus feel I single, free,
And all my life I have this empery;
It is my life, the mark of my degree.

My court? Next to the roof; a little room,
Girt with the city's griding noise and gloom,
Across whose only window house-tops loom.

LIFE

And there, when so I will, whatever jars
My sense is blotted out, and nothing mars
A reach of space outlimiting the stars.

And from the vast where myriad surges free
Of darkness toss in wild immensity,
Ere downward drawn and changed to light they be;

Ere changed to that which shocks through nerve
and brain,

And seemeth life to men who search in vain
The mystic links which mind and body chain;

From that dark vast down to my little room,
Girt with the city's griding noise and gloom,
Across whose only window house-tops loom;

O'er spaces all, o'er all times that have been,
My flashing thought unfettered makes the scene
That fits its passing mood of joy or teen.

No palace ever reared in orient land,
Can match the royal splendour I command;
No court like mine, so thronged, so rich, so grand.

LIFE

Quick as the wish, my vassals meet my sight,
From ages old and new—king, poet, knight,
And lady proud, and martyr benedight.

Dust though they be, the semblance shows as fair
As if the mortal forms were moving there,
Clad as they lived, untouched by Time's impair.

So, leaning head on hand, in quiet stay,
I mark each gaze around, then take his way
To friend or foe or lover of his day.

And if to single fellowship alone
My fancy turns, straight are the visions flown,
Save his whom I command draw near my throne.

Silent approaches an immortal name,
My senses thrill with awe, with passion flame,
Or chance the soul of brooding rules my frame.

And what to me in these blest hours that come,
The cry of sect and party, hiss and hum,
The perfect creed, the absent martyrdom,—

LIFE

Where effigies, not men, possess the mood,
And never a voice is heard or understood,
That leads mankind to closer brotherhood?

And what to me each day the gyved routine,
That makes life feel as if it had not been,
And leaves the soul a-hungered, naked, lean,—

Craving the moment it shall rouse amain
Its thoughts within the dull mechanic brain,
And quicken into being man again?

Lord of thought's best—the only true decree
Of Life and Death! If man immortal be,
But thought belongs to immortality.

To a Critic

You wonder why this open page
Still lies upon my desk,
When all the fashion turns to gauge
The latest arabesque ;

Whose trick of form and puppetry,
And stagy splash of wit,
With childish boasting claim to be
More real and exquisite.

It open lies that I may view
Its grand horizons range—
Eternal yet for ever new—
Beyond the drift of change.

The ways few mortals know that bear
To those mysterious lands,
And only one treads surely there,
And sees, and understands.

TO A CRITIC

And led by him 'mid light and gloom
That o'er vast spaces fling,
I mark the threads of human doom
In their first fashioning.

Scarce patterned yet they seem, as here
Upon the web they lie,
On which his hand in fulness clear
Shall weave men's destiny.

This gathers shape, is wrought and, lo,
Some splendour of our race!
The secret of the magic glow
That lasts on form and face,

And lingers, when we turn aside,
In captive heart and brain,
Until we cannot but abide
To turn and gaze again,

Was Shakspeare's; and 'twas he alone
Each sombre colour knew,
Which, bodying shapes of guilt, in tone,
To age on age keeps true.

TO A CRITIC

His figures live when those you laud
Are all outfrayed and die,
And where once showed your fashion's gaud,
Men stare on vacancy.

March Tempest

MINE not the poet's homage, but his scorn
And hate; a ban he writes on my dark brow,
On May's, a benison. Yet whence are born
Her flash of waters, shade of linden bough,
The rose-bloom pulsing 'neath her soft caress,
Her dawn a jewel of splendour and her day
One long sweet hour of light and loveliness,
When the rapt soul half wishes life away?

Cloud and fierce blast and leagues of mist that
sweep
Round Druid circles on the lonely moor,
Where my wild spirit wakes from secret sleep—
These womb, O May, the glory men adore.

'The Ladies'

THE toast to which you ask reply,
'The Ladies,' puzzles every man:
Yet none can tell the reason why.

The theme, how matchless! What can vie
With Beauty decked in silks and fan—
The toast to which you ask reply?

Each makes his choice—coquette or shy,
Complexion dark or fair or tan:—
Yet none can tell the reason why.

Our mothers, sisters, sweethearts, aye,
Our wives we pledge since men began
The toast to which you ask reply.

We pledge the ladies who defy
Our sex, as one whose arts trepan:
Yet none can tell the reason why.

THE LADIES

On all our blessing! To man's eye,
What more kaleidoscopic than
The toast to which you ask reply?—
Yet none can tell the reason why.

A Child's Laugh

ONLY a child's laugh,
Tuning me rightly:
Rippling epitaph,
Covering, lightly,
Discord and glooming,—
Lost in such tombing.

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